

# ABDUL HAMID'S DINNER to the KEARSARGE

**A STORY of the Sultan's Royal Hospitality and of the Crisis Precipitated by an American "Tiger," or the Fourth Cheer That Was Misunderstood**

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At the time of which I write the late Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdul Hamid II., had reigned ten years. Apparently he was then well liked by those Americans who came under his personal influence. To some of them he had shown conspicuous courtesy.

Twenty-three years afterward, in April, 1908, he was forcibly deposed by his own subjects, and with public accusations of shocking misrule. Perhaps the interest that attaches to his fateful history may lend something to my story of his royal hospitality to the personnel of the older Kearsarge at Constantinople. In the case in point the Sultan went beyond precedent—with a single exception only.

"Back in the eighties" it was the policy of the United States to keep a force of three war vessels in the Mediterranean. Commonly one of them was stationed in the Levant, as the waters of the extreme eastern Mediterranean are sometimes called. It was there that the American missionary and educational interests were greatest.

At the time of my story one vessel had been sent home and had not yet been replaced. The two vessels that remained on the station for service were the Pensacola, commanded by Captain George Dewey, and the Kearsarge, commanded by myself, then a commander in rank. The Pensacola was the flagship of Rear Admiral Samuel R. Franklin, commander in chief of the Mediterranean station. Both vessels had seen service in the civil war, wherein the Kearsarge had gained European prestige by sinking the Confederate cruiser Alabama, off Cherbourg.

Early in June, 1888, the two ships were at Smyrna. The Kearsarge had been kept in the Levant, but the Pensacola had joined recently from the western Mediterranean, and the two vessels had cruised in company along the coast of Syria. In the forenoon of June 4 I was surprised by a signal from the flagship directing me to stow our forecastle gun in the hold—a queer use for guns. Thus the Kearsarge was reduced from a seven gun ship to a six gun ship. The next day the commander in chief transferred his flag to the Kearsarge for a visit to Constantinople. The rule for the passage of the Dardanelles by war vessels was very rigid. A firman or permit from the Sultan was necessary, and none was conceded to any vessel mounting more than six guns. Therefore the rule explained the disablement of one gun of the Kearsarge and the temporary abandonment of the more powerful Pensacola as a flagship. The Kearsarge left Smyrna on the same day.

In the forenoon of the following day we anchored in the Dardanelles, under the forts of Chanak, there to await the firman of the Sultan. To make clear my further story it may be well to bring to mind that from west to east the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Marmora and the Black Sea are in chain. The first two are connected by the Dardanelles, or Hellespont, as the strait was called in ancient times. The second and third seas are connected by the Bosphorus, a similar strait. Constantinople is on the European side of the Bosphorus, close to the Sea of Marmora. Chanak and its fortifications are near ancient Abydos, the place where the fabled Leander swam the Hellespont to meet Hero and where Lord Byron repeated the feat of Leander.

In that locality also Xerxes bridged the strait with boats for the passage of his army.

## Beaten by a Girl.

Alas for the fame of Leander and Byron! At Constantinople I met a Swedish lady—now a princess—who swam the Bosphorus at Therapia, a suburb of Constantinople, lying near the Black Sea entrance. Her accomplishment equalled that of Leander and Byron at Abydos. The danger at both crossings lies in the swift and eddying currents, for the mere distance from shore to shore is much within the swimming record of many a modern girl in her "teens."

The Dardanelles, at the place where Leander and Byron swam their names into romantic history, is one and one-quarter miles wide. While the Bosphorus at Therapia is only slightly more than half as wide, the close conformation of its channel, as well as the natural features of the bottom, produce the swifter currents and the more treacherous eddies.

But all this time we have been waiting for the Sultan's firman. The ticking off of Turkish red tape is proverbially slow, so we had expected to wait long at Chanak. Greatly to our relief, however, the firman came off to the Admiral in time to enable us to resume our passage the same day. This unexpected promptness was auspicious, for indeed the whole course of our visit thereafter flowed smoothly. We arrived at Constantinople on the 6th and anchored in the Bosphorus close in to the shore of the city. Then, with a hawser made fast to a local mooring buoy astern, we were all snug and ready for events.

Chance had indeed favored the Kearsarge. We were at Constantinople, the city of mirage, where the broad sweep of Christianity finds its edge and scatters into the Orient, where olden customs and costumes survive in the races that lag, but are now come to meet the restless life of the Western world—the city of magical environment and of immediate and continuing interest to the Western visitor. But I am writing rather of an incident of our delightful visit—a visit that was full of incidents, both public and private.

Our visit was made during the period devoted an-

nually by the Mohammedans to their thirty days' severe fast of Ramadan and to the three days' festival of Balram that follows. Some of us saw salamlik, or the weekly military ceremonial of the Sultan's public appearance at a mosque for prayer.

The Admiral was received by the Sultan in person and with his staff, including myself, attended that most exclusive and gorgeous of official indoor functions, the Sultan's annual reception of the dignitaries of his Empire at the palace of Dolma Baghcheh, on the Bosphorus. We joined with the Turks in "dressing ship" and firing salutes in honor of that event. Also we were taken by officials to the famous treasury on Seraglio Point, where we saw the jewels of mighty Sultans of the past as well as great quantities of uncut precious stones heaped "in bulk."

Many other places of interest were visited, including palaces, mosques and Robert College—an American institution—and the American School for Girls, at Scutari, on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. Naturally we were proud of those admirable evidences of American spirit that attracted students from afar and from many nations and peoples.

We attended the annual exercises of the girls' school, and were amused at the little arts and graces that those foreign girls had acquired and which are peculiar to American girls. One girl, an Armenian, I think, read an essay in English, entitled "Elbows," which was full of quiet humor. After discussing the physical types and the use and misuse of elbows, she showed how they corresponded with the mental traits and activities of different people. The essay was cleverly written and would pass as current literature at Vassar or Wellesley.

## The Dinner.

But we were leading up, though unknown to ourselves, to the crowning honor of the Kearsarge's visit. About July 5 the Sultan declared his intention, through Mr. Cox, the American Minister, to give a dinner to the Admiral and the officers and men of the Kearsarge. His Majesty called for the number that could be expected. A goodly number was named, but not large enough, it appeared, for the degree of hospitality that was intended.

The Sultan desired that the number be increased. A regulation of the navy interposed somewhat. It limited absence from the ship at one time to one-half of the officers and crew and prescribed that there should always be maintained on board an organized force that would be effective for any emergency. I myself feared that there was a limit to the number of our enlisted men who could trust themselves to guage their drinking to the extremely nice demands of a royal dinner.

Good intentions sometimes drown quickly in strong liquor. Better to have remained away from Constantinople than to weaken the favorable impression that had led to the Sultan's hospitality. The Admiral selected a delegation of officers, and after a careful study of the conduct records I named fifty-five of the crew as the limit of men who could be spared. The Sultan was diplomatically informed in the matter—that is to say, with such explanation as the American Minister deemed it well to submit.

On July 7, the day of the dinner, "haircuts and

from New York to Chicago to attend a banquet in honor of the President of the United States and to "be prepared to respond to a toast to the navy." Five minutes before I was called to my feet before that immense audience the correspondents of the press asked me what I intended to say. I replied, "I don't know; I ask the prayers of my friends." Yes, I know how the Admiral felt. But to return to the Sultan's table.

esty has forgotten nobody to-night; neither shall we. Three cheers for the whole Ottoman Empire!"

## The Tiger's Growl.

The limit of voice of every man went out then into the cheers that followed, but "like a bolt from the blue" came also—as the men's voluntary contribution—that amiable, deep throated, aggregate growl, a "tiger."

Immediately there was inquiring astonishment, if



"Like a Bolt from the Blue" Came Also—as the Men's Voluntary Contribution—That Amiable, Deep Throated, Aggregate Growl, a "Tiger"

Mr. Cox, always a graceful and fluent orator, made an appropriate address in our behalf, and, for once in his life, withheld the humor that bubbled within him. Mr. Cox lauded international good will and gave credit to the Orient for the boon of chemistry and mathematics. We sat long at table and then retired in a body to another room, where we smoked and conversed. Soon Lieutenant Stanton, the Admiral's flag lieutenant, came to me and said our entertainers had asked the Admiral if he would not like to address his own men of the crew. The Admiral requested me to serve as his proxy for the purpose. I felt no hesitation in addressing my own men, certainly not, if I might thereby please the commander in chief. We went to the great hall or lobby where the men were assembled for smoking.

The Turkish officials were alert, and doubtless eager to observe the attitude of officer to man in the navy of a democratic nation. Our men were in fine and legitimate spirits. I learned that they had agreed among themselves to restrict their drinking of the seductive champagne to one glass for each man, and they had kept the faith. In my address I explained to the men the very exceptional nature of His Majesty's hospitality, and the absence of all hope, on our own part, that we could ever make any adequate return in kind.

"But," said I, "we can at least give expression to an appreciation that will match even this royal entertainment. Then I called for three cheers for 'His Majesty the Sultan,' and they were given with a will. I had observed that the Turks gave but one cheer to the Sultan, so our own three cheers must have been impressive.

Resuming, I reminded the men that the Sultan had brought us into close company that night with members of the Turkish army and navy, and I called for another three cheers, this time for the Turkish army and navy. Again the cheers rang out lustily and pleasure illumined the faces of our Turkish friends. We were doing good, dynamic work, but the climax approached.

I next told the men that we had just learned that while we were dining the Sultan had caused a steamer to be sent alongside the Kearsarge with precisely the same dinner for the officers and men who had not been so fortunate as to join us on shore. The effect of this news was electrical. Nothing could have pleased the men more. When the murmur of delight had subsided I said:—"Men, it appears that His Maj-

not consternation, among the Turkish officials. "What was the meaning of that growl?"

That and other questions were asked Mr. Cox. With no small concern Mr. Cox hastened to me and said in a low voice, "We are, of course, familiar with the 'tiger' at home, but what does it mean? I have never analyzed the meaning. What shall I tell them?" For a moment I was at a loss. Doubtless I was held responsible for that unexpected growl—and at a royal dinner!

Happily a thought came to me. I replied to Mr. Cox, in rather a loud voice, "Having made known our sentiments in our cheers, the 'tiger' expressed confusion, but amiably, to those who would refuse to join with us."

Mr. Cox beamed wisely. Returning to the Minister of Marine he made it plain that the "tiger" was intended by the men as an enthusiastic and truly American evidence of further good will, and it was, in fact, so intended. The seeming contretemps was dispelled. International relations were once more up and about and still more strongly "cemented." Doubtless the Sultan was informed of every detail of that dinner, especially as to the way in which our men had enriched the sentiment of the occasion with a wild American "tiger." Certainly his representatives were in the end both amused and complimented.

The dinner was over. We returned to our boats under escort and found that the Bridge of Boats and the shores of the Golden Horn were illuminated in honor of the Sultan's guests. Pleasant words were exchanged and we returned to the Kearsarge as we came. It was true—all who had remained on board had been served with the same royal feast, and the liquid part had called for much nicety of executive action, lest the navy regulations be trampled upon. The Sultan must have been pleased, for the next day he sent his oldest son, Prince Selim, then only sixteen, to visit the Kearsarge to express His Majesty's satisfaction in our coming to Constantinople and to give us the "imperial greeting." All hands were called aft and the Prince addressed them to that effect. We left Constantinople on July 9, and on the 12th arrived at Syra, Greece, where the Admiral transferred his flag back to the Pensacola. Afterward, when the Kearsarge returned alone to Ottoman waters, it was found that the news of the Sultan's dinner had preceded us and that officials had received commands from the Porte to do us honor. At Beirut, Syria, the Governor of the province visited the ship and was kind enough to say:—"I saw the fine manner in which you approached the shore rapidly and came to anchor promptly. It was worthy of the excellent reputation of the Kearsarge."